

RAISED Bill 1093

*An Act Providing for Municipal Matching Grants for Demand Responsive
Transportation for Elderly Persons and Persons with Disabilities*

Testimony of James Boutelle
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My name is James Boutelle. I serve as the Executive Director of the Transportation Association of Greenwich. I have been involved with elderly and disabled transportation for 15 years. I came before you four years ago when you first decided to begin the program that is now slated for elimination. As a local elected official, I recognize that you as legislators are placed in the difficult position of having to make painful and necessary choices. I just want to make sure that you have all the pertinent facts in making your determinations

The Transportation Association of Greenwich, TAG, has operated the Dial a Ride Program in Greenwich for the past 2 years. I have come today to explain that eliminating this funding from the next biennial budget will not in fact lead to an \$8,000,000 cost savings to the State. TAG has provided an average of 12,000 trips under this service annually. The Greenwich share of this grant is \$77,000. That computes to \$6.42 state grant money per Dial a Ride trip.

Under contract with the Norwalk Transit District, TAG has also operated the ADA service for Greenwich and much of Stamford for the past 12 years. The statewide average cost of an ADA trip is close to \$30.00. Our current approved billing rate with Norwalk Transit is \$28.58 per trip. The state pays 100% of the cost of these trips whereas they pay less than half the cost of a dial a ride trip.

This is important because many of the users of the Dial a Ride service would be eligible for ADA service but have chosen to use the Dial a Ride program instead. Getting certified for the ADA service can take up to six weeks and for some of these clients has a certain stigma attached. But if the Dial a Ride program were eliminated they would most likely transition to the ADA program. If only 20% of the client trips transitioned over from Dial a Ride to ADA, the \$77,000 grant would be replaced by 2,400 new ADA billings at \$28.58 each or \$68,592. Thus, the net savings from Greenwich would be only \$8,408. While reducing the cost to the State by a mere 11%, the number of trips provided has been reduced by 80%.

The pain of eliminating this program would not be felt equally around the state. The above transition to ADA service can only occur in communities served by fixed route bus systems. An ADA trip must originate and terminate within $\frac{3}{4}$ mile of a fixed route bus line. Many of the smaller and rural communities do not have fixed route lines and thus

would not be able to transition over their needier riders. A frail senior or disabled individual in these communities would be left with no transportation options.

This state grant program uses a formula to divide 50% of the grant based upon a town share of the geographic area and the other 50% based upon a town's share of the senior and disabled population. In addition, this program requires localities to match the state funding. This is one of the reasons the cost per trip to the state is so much lower than the ADA trips. If the state grant is eliminated, many towns who are also under budget pressure would most likely not continue their funding either. The net effect would be to remove \$16,000,000 in funding for senior and disabled transportation.

In Greenwich, close to 80% of our Dial a Ride trips are for medical appointments. I have read about much discussion here in Hartford about improving access to and making our Health care system more affordable. What good would an improved medical system be to a senior if they can't get there?